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CLASS DISTINCTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.

TO SAY that where there are no classes there can be no class distinctions, and that in the United States, as no classes are recognized, either by law or by established custom, class distinctions are impossible, may be obvious and trite; but in the eyes of many persons, not unintelligent nor yet unthoughtful, it is far from being superfluous. From some of our publicists, notably from some of our most widely influential journalists, protest is frequently heard against the word "class" when it is applied to the various elements of our society. It is denied, in a tone of asperity and resentment, that we have such distinctions as classes of people. Nevertheless, the word, or the phrase, is used with a continuance which is almost incessant. We read daily of our "wealthy class," our "professional class," our "laboring class," our "cultivated class," and the like, but strangely never, in seriousness, of our governing class; although within the last forty years we have received, as the boon of Democracy and circumstance, in our professional politicians, a body which comes nearer to being an established class, and a governing class, than any other, findable and definable, within our borders. And in a North-western newspaper—of all quarters!—I have met with mention of higher classes, and, verily, of high rank, in such a paragraph as this: "Most of the dailies [newspapers] are prepared for the higher classes; and thus emanating from men of high rank, and going toward the best part of the public, they are probably worthy of more praise than blame."

This is puzzling; and the more is it so because it comes from a writer whose articles are rated above the level of ordinary editorial work, even in what are called leading journals. What does such language mean? Plainly, its most important words have not either their inherent signification, or that which is attached to them by good usage, or even by common usage. To

say absolutely, and without qualification, that certain views are set forth, or certain publications made, by men of high rank, means, in English, that the men thus characterized are of a high established social grade; but that it was here intended to claim such a position for journalists is hardly among the possibilities of Western extravagance. There is no room for doubt that what was really meant was that the writers for most of the daily newspapers were men of a high intellectual grade; an opinion which will not lack a large journalistic concurrence. But what are those higher classes for whom these journals are prepared? and what is that best part of the public toward whom the emanations of these high intellects tend? I cite this paragraph, and thus comment upon it, with no fault-finding purpose, and only as an occasion and an ensample. The inquiry as to the meaning of the words used is no mere exercise in verbal criticism; for the confusion and the dissension in regard to this subject arise chiefly (as confusion, misunderstanding, and consequent dissension are apt to arise) from a misapprehension of the true meaning of words, and a use of them by two or more parties in differing and incorrect senses.

The indignant denier of the existence of classes in the United States is very right as to what he means, but very wrong as to what he says. For, until both man and society are something that they are not, and never have been, the one must fall into classes in the other. It is difficult to imagine a society in which there are, rightly speaking, no classes. To find such a society in a stage of development above the rudimentary is impossible. The African negro and the aboriginal American are the highest representatives of a society in which there are no classes. For what is a class in society? Let us go for our definition to an "American," one whose democratic sympathies were of the strongest, one whose authority in definition is of weight. Webster says that a class is "a group of individuals ranked together as possessing common characteristics; as the different classes of society; the educated class, the lower classes." This is his latest definition, which is better, although not greatly, than that in his edition of 1828: "A number of persons in society supposed to have some resemblance or equality in rank, education, property, talents, and the like; as in the phrase, all classes of men in society." The improvement consists chiefly in the elimination of rank and talent as distinctions of class. For, in a democratic

society, in which there are no ranks, there may be, or, rather, must be classes; and in aristocratic societies we see, unhappily too often, that talents do not accompany rank. Indeed, what is plainer than that talents, as the gift of nature, are, like her other gifts, distributed indiscriminately as to ranks and classes, unequally as to individuals?

Assuming that no rational person will assert that any form of society can exist without groups of individuals who may be ranked together as possessing common characteristics, and that therefore there must be classes of society, even in the United States, we may yet admit the justice of the often heard protest against their recognition, when we discover what the protesters have in mind. They do not mean classes: they do mean established and privileged classes. There are in the United States no classes of men born, none formed, none recognized in any way, who have the right to do any conceivable thing, to do which all other men have not the right. In England, for example, there is a certain class of men who are born to a position as legislators; and this class forms a part of a much larger class born with the right to go to court; and there are certain occupations, which, of themselves, exclude from court those who follow them; and there, too, men have certain rights of precedence which are not only recognized, but which can be enforced. In the United States, on the contrary, all citizens have equal rights in the executive residence of their governors or their president; there is no rank but that of superior and subordinate in the military or civil service of the people; no precedence except that which is voluntarily awarded to position, to merit, to age, or, by the graceful deference of strength, to sex.

The distinctive quality of society in the United States is equality. It is not liberty; still less is it fraternity. Our social and political structure is peculiar among those of the principal communities of the civilized world, not in that here all men's rights are protected,—far from it,—but in that here all men's rights are equal, and not only equal, but absolutely the same. And this equality, or identity, is what the “average American”—be he Irish or German, or born here of Irish or German parents, or of parents native but indefinable—chiefly values. Deny him fraternity if you will; take from him liberty or even property, by form of law, if you can; but leave him equality, and he is measurably content. He asks not the insur-

ing and maintenance of that liberty which is his because he must respect the rights of others; he demands that no one shall have rights or "chances" that he has not. The political boss, with his swarm of unclean followers, may deprive him of all that is vital and valuable in political liberty; corporations and monopolists may rob him, under the forms of purchased law, of his property, of his very house and home, of his comfort, and of all the beauty of his life; and not only will he not resist, he will not protest, if only he is secure in his equal right to deprive, if he can, all other men of their liberty, and to rob, if he can, according to law, all other men of their property; and that, having done so, he also shall be a magnate, merchant-prince, railway lord, caucus king, or what not. But there is no such if; none such possible or conceivable. Absolute equality in all things, and as to all things, right or wrong, good or bad, is the cement of that simple structure, society in the United States.

But the word society is used in two senses—one political or municipal, the other social or company-able. It is as to society in the former sense that the "average American" insists upon and has, in absoluteness, this equality. Socially, he will have none of it. His leveling there is a leveling down, not a leveling up; except in his own person. In that regard he does not believe that "one man's as good as another, and better too," unless he is the one who is the better. Since civilization began, the social world has seen few such changes as those which have taken place in the society of the United States during the last sixty years, and chiefly during the last thirty; and among these changes the chiefest visible is the bent toward elegance of every human creature whom fortune or exertion has raised above the primal cares of life. Not comfort, not even the substantial elements of luxury, are sought with that universal rage which is shown for elegance of outward seeming. In all that lies upon the surface this is visible; in our theaters, for example. Our fathers sat in dingy houses and on hard benches, looking upon scenery never beautiful, rarely correct, often shabby, and upon actors whose dresses were like the scenery; but night after night they might see, in stimulating and instructive alternation, the works of the best dramatists in the language acted with such ability and completeness that they could be enjoyed, if not always in all the parts admired, from the rise to the fall of the curtain. We sit in theaters which are themselves a splendid

show, and every box in which is fit for a king, looking upon scenery beautifully painted and carefully studied, and costumes which blaze and bloom upon the stage; but we in vapid plays have vapid acting; and one or two of these poor weaklings will run through a whole season at one theater, and sometimes one through two seasons. The change has been made simply to satisfy and please the public: there is no other motive. If managers saw that plays of dramatic and literary merit—acted by companies of clever, well-trained artists, in houses not dingy, but plain, clean, and comfortable, and with such scenery and costume as sufficed to remove the action from every-day associations—would attract the people upon whom they depend for support, such plays, so acted, in such houses, they would give. No man spends more time, trouble, or money in his business than are necessary to make it successful and profitable. Shakespeare did not, we may be sure.

The audiences assembled by these shallow, vulgar plays, showily presented in these splendid houses, differ from the old audiences just as the new spectacle differs from the old. In former times, the first row of boxes—dress-circle, it was called—was filled, and except on occasions of unusual attraction moderately filled, with elegantly dressed men and women of more or less pretensions to “fashion”; while the pit or parterre (now absurdly called the parquet) and the upper boxes were occupied by a respectably dressed crowd, intent only upon enjoyment of the performance. Now, unless one of these vapid plays fills one of these gaudy houses, “parquet,” boxes, balconies, and so forth, every night for months, or at least for weeks, it is regarded as a failure; and all the people who make its success are clad in fine raiment. Moreover, it requires but a little observation to discover in all of them a certain subtle consciousness of manner, which reveals a pretension to be elegant. Whether this elegance is even skin-deep, whether the superior quality of their apparel strikes in at all below the surface, and whether they are able to buy with their wardrobes the refinement of which they are intended as the outward sign, are questions which may here be left unanswered and unconsidered.

What is true of the theaters is true of all places in which the public of our day and country may be observed,—streets, hotels, and churches. Everywhere there is the same approach to equality

of seeming; and everywhere the objective point is the same—external elegance.

The causes of this are not far to seek; they are simply two—sudden wealth and democracy. The spirit of democracy had not thoroughly penetrated the people of the United States until the first quarter of the present century had passed. Up to that time the social habits and influences of the old colonial days were prevalent, although with slowly diminishing power. Until that time there was still a deference in the mass of the people for a class which, partly by culture, partly by character, and partly by such moderate possessions as were then called wealth, were the acknowledged leaders of society. The administration of Andrew Jackson may be regarded as the period when this feeling of deference disappeared, except in the slave States, where it was preserved by the effect of the “peculiar institution” of those sovereignties. Soon after the year 1830, the people of the Northern or free States became to all intents and purposes homogeneous. And yet from that period they began to be, in one important respect, year by year more heterogeneous; for then began the flood of foreign immigration. The thousands and hundreds of thousands of strange people thus added every year to the population of the Northern States were not only without education of any kind in mind, in morals, and in manners, but without any knowledge of the country into which they were received, with a merely nominal probation, as citizens. They knew no more of its history or of its society than the world at large knew fifty years ago of those of Japan. Moreover, they had been suffering from poverty and oppression, and they came here to find plenty and freedom. “What do you mean?” said a lady, some years ago, to her servants who rebelled against a proposed restriction of waste in the kitchen. “You know that you never saw meat once a week at home?” “Sure, mim,” was the reply, “and didn’t we coom here to git mate ivery day, an’ three times a day if we cud?” These immigrant peasants clutched eagerly at all that they could get; and chiefly they clung to something other than plenty and freedom, which they found, and perhaps had not expected to find—equality. They soon discovered, what was discovered about the same time by the mass of the people in the Northern States, that in a pure democracy there is practically no difference between man and man other than that which is made by the possession of money. That apart, all men are equal.

Character, culture, breeding, learning, talents, may be of importance to the individuals who possess them, and to their immediate friends and acquaintances; but unless they produce money they are "caviare to the general." The mass of "Americans," native-born and foreign-born, arrived at the point where they now stand,—the appreciation of all men, themselves included, solely according to the number of dollars under their control. Needless to say that to this there were and are some exceptions; needless, too, that they were and are so proportionately few as to be in the main of no account whatever.

Then the great West was opened; California was discovered; petroleum; railways were necessary; and, beyond necessity, the great schemes of railway speculation were formed. The country, prosperous before, began to grow rich with a rapidity unprecedented. Upon the thriving possessors of half a continent, who were just "realizing" the capabilities of their situation, came the great civil war, which, after a four years' struggle of blood and blunder, preserved the unity of the Government and destroyed the social and political constitution of the Southern sovereignties. It had one other important consequence: absolute equality and identity of personal rights was established throughout the United States.*

The South had fought to maintain an inequality of personal rights and an aristocratic form of society. The North had fought, not in a crusade for equality and against aristocracy, but for money; for the riches which it had acquired, and that the newly developed means for acquiring riches might not be destroyed; for nothing else. After the first flush of enthusiasm caused by the bombardment of Fort Sumter—"firing on the flag"—had subsided, before which no insult, no defiance, and notably, very notably, no enthusiasm for liberty and equality had been able to awaken enough fighting spirit in the North to lead the administrators of the Federal Government to take any important steps for its preservation,—after this excitement had subsided, and yet the war must needs be prosecuted or the Government be destroyed, the contest became one of money for the

* And yet, before this article goes to press there comes from the United States District Court of Texas a decision which surely cannot surprise any unbiased student of the Constitution, that the Fourteenth Amendment is unconstitutional, because it trenches upon the expressly reserved rights of the States.

sake of money. The war was virtually carried on by the moneyed men, the business men, of the North. They furnished its "sinews"; and this they did for their own purposes and in their own interests. Many of them grew rich by means of the war; most of them saw that in its successful prosecution lay their future prosperity. The war time was a money-making time, and the war was a money-making process. The Federal Government was victorious simply because it had the most men and the most money on its side; and it had the most men because it had the most money. The Confederate cause failed simply because its men and its money were exhausted; for no other reason. Inequality came to an end in the South; equality was established throughout the Union; but the real victors were the money-makers, merchants, bankers, manufacturers, railway men, monopolists, and speculators. It was their cause that had triumphed under the banner of freedom. General Grant has been roughly handled by caricaturists and paragraphists as a beggar. Verily, his reward has been small at the hands of those to whom he rendered his chief service. If the business men of the North had given him an income of one thousand dollars a day, and General Sherman one of five hundred, they would have insufficiently acknowledged what those stubborn soldiers did for them.

After a comparatively brief period of dull reaction, the country started again upon its interrupted course of prosperity with an impetus that was like the force of a continuous explosion, and with results the semblance of which the world till then had never seen. The exhaustless material wealth of the country, and the rapid increase of its population (the influx of immigrants keeping, on one hand, production strained to its utmost, and augmenting, on the other, the productive power); the failure of Europe, and particularly of England, to supply its own demands for food; with other forces which need not be here set forth,—combined to pour a flood of riches into the United States so vast, so diffusive, so splendid, and at the same time so solid, that we became the Dives of nations. History records no such swift, substantial growth in material prosperity as that of the United States during the last fifty years, and chiefly since the civil war. Men who twenty years ago had nothing have now hundreds of thousands of dollars, millions, tens of millions. And the numbers of those thus suddenly enriched are not hundreds, not thousands or tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands; while around them are thriving millions in a condition of firm

comfort. Upon such a spectacle the sun of prosperity never shone before. Of these men, and of the women who belong to them, very few, in proportion, would be regarded in any other country as educated, still fewer as persons of intellectual or social culture. They have money; nothing more. The result of the forces which have been in operation in this country during the last generation has been to give to this vast multitude two things—unprecedented wealth with absolute equality, likewise without precedent.

It is not in human nature that such a course of events, with such consequences, should be without effect upon the social bearing and seeming of the people among whom it has occurred. And in the present case, the effect of such a sudden increase of wealth has been greatly enhanced and much modified by the influence of foreign example. Europe comes in as a factor in our social problem. It is quite within the limits of truth to say that, for ten "Americans" who visited Europe fifty years ago, a thousand have done so within the last ten years. The effect of this intercourse has been in some respects advantageous; in others, rather deplorable and even ridiculous. For, of these purse-filled tourists, the number who were by nature or by education prepared to receive the benefits of European travel was so very small that in the great mass they were of no account. And, unfortunately, what they sought in Europe was not that instruction and that refinement of taste which Europe is qualified to give: they went either "to have a good time" or to rush through picture-galleries and cathedrals and scenery, that they might come back fitted to set up as people of travel and of culture. But whatever they may have failed to acquire of Europe's long-stored social and mental wealth, few of them failed to learn to imitate the least admirable of the manners and customs of Europe—those which lay upon the surface; those which might be gathered from a superficial observation of the most pretentious and most frivolous society, the only society in Europe to which such casual travelers or such transient sojourners would be admitted. The pitiable spectacle of the American colony in Paris during the Second Empire may be passed over here without remark;* but the effect of these and their like upon society in the United States has been deplorably

* It has received incisive comment from the competent pens of Mr. George William Curtis, in his "Potiphar Papers," and Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, in his recent paper, "Colonialism in America."

debasement and vulgarizing. The observation of "high life" by such spectators, so transient, so ignorant, so incapable of thought, reveals to them nothing which may not be obtained by an expenditure of money; and, briefly (for I must be brief), this vast increase of wealth, this democratic equality, and these skippings over the surface of European society, working together, have produced as their resultant a social monster called in the newspapers "Society," or "World of Fashion." Now society and fashion (singular, inexplicable word thus used) are no new things here; but not this society, this fashion. Some money is necessary always for the formation and maintenance of a cultivated society; some exclusiveness must be practiced, or your society becomes a general bear-garden. But this society rests upon money only: not upon property, possessions, estates; but upon sheer money, that may be put in a box and carried about, got one day and lost another, like a watch or a toy, and with no more social disturbance; and this exclusiveness excludes only those who have little money, and as to the bears, shuts many of them not out, but in. Let any man who chooses so to spend time and trouble read the highly interesting paragraphs under the "World of Society" and "Circle of Fashion" headings, in three or four of our leading newspapers, and if he has any particular knowledge of society, and a knowledge which extends backward beyond the war, he will see that quite seven-tenths of them relate to people who, at that time, would themselves not have dreamed of themselves as persons of gentility (to use an obsolescent word), not to say of consideration or fashion; people without breeding, without education; whose every word and every tone (surest evidence on such a point) betrays the inferior associations in which they grew up; whose language, whether they speak or write, would be put to shame by that of a well-bred upper servant in England; and whose notions of politeness are confined to the observance of etiquette, which can be taught to a monkey and poured into a man, and yet more easily into a woman, as liquor can be poured out of one vessel into another; who have, indeed, generally a sort of formless, insipid good-nature, but of courtesy, inborn or inbred, no conception whatever.*

* The working classes can secure a great addition to their present enjoyments by cultivating among themselves a more refined society and gentler manners. There has been already a noticeable improvement in this respect among our native workmen especially; and the manners of many of them

They have simply money,—money which they are ready to spend for their own coarse pleasures; money which they are even willing to give away—for their own aggrandizement; money which they are anxious to use in every mode which will enable them to “get on” and make a figure. Besides these, who are hundreds and thousands, there are others not so prominently rich, who are tens and hundreds of thousands, that are of like origin and social history, and who all more or less affect elegance and “aristocracy,” and talk of society and fashion. Most, but not absolutely all, of these, like most, but not absolutely all, of the others, are wholly, utterly lacking in any claim to distinction from the crowds that swarm to Barnum’s Greatest Show on Earth, except money,—money gotten quickly, and in too many cases not honorably, although not illegally. But because of their money and their gross and selfish expenditure of it, they, or rather (it is but right and fair to say), very many of them, seem to think that they have a position in this country corresponding to that of the leaders of society in Europe; for example, the nobility and gentry of England. They keep their fathers and their mothers hidden away,—in closets upstairs, or in the waste places and remote corners of the land,—and set up for people of fashion upon fine clothes, bric-à-brac, and champagne.

Ignorance is in a great measure the cause of this pretension. The pretenders are so absolutely void of elemental knowledge of the constitution and the history of society as to assume that, because the higher classes of other countries have money and live expensively, therefore money and expensive living make higher classes—an aristocracy. The same ignorance and the same inversion of the order of reason leads them to assume that, because the movements and the entertainments of eminent people in really aristocratic societies are chronicled in the newspapers, if they can have their doings recorded in the newspapers for the mere gratification of an idle public curiosity, they become in like manner eminent. Within the last ten years—

will now compare favorably with those of the business classes; though it must be added that the manners of the business classes themselves admit of no little improvement. But among a certain portion of the working class, very abundant in the city of New York, manners seem to be an unknown art, while society, in any proper sense of the term, would appear to be an impossibility.—“The Century,” July, 1883.

it is hardly so long—the outbreak of this folly has been at once a saddening and a ridiculous symptom of our diseased social condition. The doings and the family arrangements, marriages and the like, of grandees in aristocratic countries are published, because all that relates to such people, from the monarch down, is of more or less public importance. Those people are the governing classes of those countries, and they represent, either by inheritance or some sort of succession, the people who have stood in like positions for many generations. They hold the greater part of the land; they are the chief owners of the countries in which they live. If a prince or a duke is ill, or if his son is about to marry, it is a matter of some—more or less—real public interest. But if a man who has made ten millions of dollars in honest trade, or by doubtful speculation, and who has done nothing else, is ill, or has a daughter married, or gives an entertainment, of what public importance is it, or of what conceivable interest, outside of his private circle of acquaintance, except to snobs, quidnuncs, gossips, and curiosity-mongers? That such doings of such people should be dignified by publication as part of the news of the day is a pitiable exhibition of pinchbeck flunkeyism, worthy only of human apes and parrots.

When Americans who have become rich by trade or speculation assume the position, and affect, to the best of their blundering ability, the customs of an aristocratic class, it must be with utter lack both of memory and of common sense. Memories, very short ones, would tell them what they themselves were only a few years ago; common sense would teach them that, what they were, some unlooked-for turn of fortune's wheel might easily make them again, making at the same time others just what they are now. While I am writing, a paragraph comes before me recording the fall, the lamentable fall, of a man who, but a few years ago, was one of the millionaires of a great western community, and as such duly "honored." He was driven to take a place as salesman in a large trading house in another city, and there, by misconduct, which showed that he must have been always without principle, ruined himself in reputation as before he had been ruined in fortune. The transitory, shifting nature of our newly gotten wealth is one of its most striking and characteristic features. It is not like that of a true aristocracy stayed upon the land, or inwrought with the

structure of the Government. The saleswoman who serves a customer who, descending from her carriage, sweeps up in a costume that cost the poor girl's yearly salary five times over, and makes her demands and gives her orders in a tone which a countess would think vulgarly uncivil, and in language which should exclude her from competitive examination for a school teacher's place, probably looks with envy, and perhaps with admiration, at the "stylish" woman of "fashion." But constituted as American society is, she is, out of all question, by right her equal; and in ninety-nine cases of one hundred she is, according to all reasonable appreciation, truly and actually her equal in every respect, except the possession, the present possession, of money. The two, in ninety-nine cases of the hundred, are alike, the same woof and web, one of no better birth or breeding or education or connection than the other.* A "corner" in lard or the striking of "ile" by the husband of the one has made her just what a "corner" in lard or the striking of "ile" by a future husband may make the other. There is no other appreciable or possibly detectable difference between them; and the poorer is not unfrequently the better mannered and the better educated of the two. Moreover, the action of like causes to those which placed the one in a position to command the services of the other may in a very short time reverse their respective attitudes. It is not thus that even the wealth of a real aristocracy is made or unmade. Not long ago, a lady in New York was astonished to find that a little

* Not long ago, one afternoon, I entered a Broadway car and took my seat opposite a woman brilliant in beauty and elegant in person and in costume, who was, before me, the only passenger. Her appearance was so dainty, and her costume so combined richness with sober good taste, that I was a little at a loss why so very exquisite a dame should honor such an humble conveyance as a street-car with her presence. As we neared Madison Square, two middle-aged ladies entered of very different eye. Nothing possible more respectable, but little imaginable more unlovely. The dust of very rustic recesses clung to their flabby satchels, and their costumes showed a vain, though painful, study of "Harper's Bazar" and use of Demorest's patterns. After a moment or two, they began to regard their fair and splendid predecessor with great interest, and to interchange words and glances which soon attracted her attention. She looked at them a moment, and then stretching out her mousquetaire-gloved hand, exclaimed, in a whining snarl which, coming from such lips, was like hartshorn fuming from a rose: "The land! Deoo tell, ef 'taint yeoo!" Notwithstanding the fine feathers, the bird had been hatched in the same nest and sung the same note.

shop at which she dealt, and where she was served over the counter by the principals, was kept by the own cousins, bearing the name, of a moneyed grandee of great social eminence, whose wife could not rattle her tea-cups and saucers without an echo under "Circles of Fashion." It is not thus that a real aristocracy, even of *bourgeoisie*, is constituted.

Verily, bats and moles and owls might see that exclusive pretensions and attempts at class distinction in a society based upon wealth acquired by trade or speculation within the memory of living men are too essentially foolish to be worth a moment's respectful consideration. Such pretensions in the United States of to-day are so monstrous, so incongruous, so preposterously absurd, that, if they are continued, some modern Rabelais or Cervantes, looking down upon them from the throne of common sense, and compelled by temptation and material, will dip his pen in ridicule and shake the world with laughter.

Because, however, political or municipal equality is the absolute and unalterable law of the United States of America, now and forever, and because our new "merchant princes" are ridiculous, not as merchants, but as princes,* to conclude that we are without a social aristocracy, not unrecognized and not unprized, would show an ignorance worthy of the average European critic of our society. What it is has been hinted in the earlier pages of this article. The several circles which form it in the several centers of society are at once the most reserved and the least pretentious that we have;† but access to them is sought and

* This phrase "merchant prince" is used with a perversion of its right meaning, which is preposterous, in the true sense of that word. It is applied to almost every man who becomes very rich in trade; quite inappropriately and ignorantly. Its origin is the passage in *Isaiah* in which it is said of Tyre, that her "merchants are princes," meaning not that a Tyrian became a prince when he had made a great deal of money by buying and selling, but that in Tyre (the most powerful of the commercial communities of antiquity) even princes engaged in commerce. Clear enough this, merely from the complete passage, which is rarely or never heard: "Whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honorable of the earth."

† Once on a time when, in a town not five hundred miles from Boston, a great entertainment was to be given which set "society" and "circles of fashion" agog, a man, whose forefathers were gentlemen and scholars before the United States existed, entered a costumer's shop, and was about to speak, when the female boss broke out: "I can't take another order, sir; not one; I'm so put about with this A. ball that I'm almost crazy." "Oh, never mind," was the reply: "I'm only a common man, and I don't know the A.'s; but I'd like a yard of gold lace if you'd be kind enough to sell it." About the

valued by those who are well enough informed in social matters to be aware of their existence. They are confined, of course, to our older commonwealths; for such well-rooted growths do not spring up, even in a republic, in one generation, nor yet in two; and these people were of well-known character and culture and social consideration when even the western part of New York was a savage-haunted wilderness. Some of them have been for a time longer than the age of the United States moderately wealthy, and all of them have been able to command that leisure without which education and social culture are impossible. But wealthy or not, they had such character and such breeding that they were highly considered by their neighbors, who recognized their social superiority, looked up to them as leaders, and sent them as their representatives to the colonial legislatures; and they were judges, ministers, and clergymen (of the Church of England). Of these people some are now rich, but others are poor (that is, among rich people); but the higher classes, and also the lower, of aristocratic societies detect their quality at once, and are often puzzled by the incongruity of manners and position. "Strange!" said one of these; "you have senators and governors, or men who are both, living like dukes and with as much influence, and who yet are pompous, low-bred, and uneducated; and men of the best birth and breeding among you are auctioneers, or journalists, or physicians, or even stock-brokers." As I am writing, a paragraph comes before me recording the death of a representative of this class in a small town in Connecticut. It may be fitly reproduced here:

"Mrs. Nancy (Coit) Learned, widow of the late Edward Learned, who died on Wednesday at her family house in New London, Conn., was one of the oldest and most honored inhabitants of that city. She outlived her hus-

same time a lady, in whose family on both sides were colonial governors and holders of manors, but who is notably quiet in dress and reserved in manner, was in a hotel "elevator" in the Fifth Avenue, where the bearing of a very richly dressed female passenger was so assuming and aggressive that finally, as she brushed out with a great flourish of rudeness, the other asked in wonder, "Pray, who is that lady?" "Mrs. Z.," was the reply. Now, the whole kin of the Z's, in the only previous generation in which the existence of Z's was known, had been cartmen and marketmen, in which capacity this gorgeous and explosive female's father had not improbably served the father of her before whom she had blown herself up so largely; but now they live, the reporters say, in a "palatial mansion," with the Z. arms carved upon their mantel-piece! and they flout people (when they don't suspect who they are) who seem to have little money and who have gentle manners.

band many years, and was last, though not least, in her generation of a wide connection long known for distinguished service to society. Born of a line of true gentleness, and united in marriage with a similar line near akin to her in blood, her own most rich gifts of bodily and mental brightness, of womanly sense and virtue, made her a fine example of the earlier New England school of principle and manners. She died amid her descendants to the third generation, in the same house where her married life and her widowhood were passed." *

It is not necessary to have known this lady personally (and I had not that honor) to be fully aware of the place which she and her kindred rightfully held in society; and held not by force of money; for although of that (perhaps the occasion may excuse my presumption) there was surely enough for comfort, and even for elegance, and also for benevolence (rarely appealed to in New England), it may be safely assumed that many a curb-stone broker, whose father would not have entered their house except by the back door, has in six months made more than their entire possessions in past days, by going short or going long, or some other sort of uneven going. This class realized, as nearly as possible, the ideal of a social aristocracy; for their rule, co-existing with municipal equality, was the social superiority and government of the best. Now, when the best are cast down from their social thrones, their places must be taken by those who are little better than gilded rudesbys and successful sharpers. And, indeed, these social *aristoi* seem to be dwindling in power and importance; beaten down and made comparatively little by the brute power of money in a heterogeneous, half-foreign community, which knows them not, as the Pharaoh arose that knew not Joseph. If the two mingle, the best will surely be debased. That law is absolute. And thus, in any case, it would seem that we are to show that in a perfectly democratic society, where the municipal rights of all are equal and identical, no aristocracy is possible, even in a social sense; but that its seemly and gracious presence must be replaced by a bloated plutocracy, that basest and coarsest and most degrading of social forces.

RICHARD GRANT WHITE.

* New York "Evening Post," June 7, 1883: manifestly, I think, an adaptation from a Connecticut newspaper.